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Can We Abolish Poverty?

The BBC website news bulletin recently carried an article under the heading “*Can We Abolish Poverty?*” (29th March 2015). The article did not explain how and why capitalism caused poverty but suggested that globalisation, free trade and free markets would eradicate poverty in our lifetime; that is by 2030, some fifteen years away.

This is a common view about poverty and the triumph of so-called globalisation, a view held by politicians, capitalists like Bill Gates and rock musicians like Bono; a belief that capitalism and the political will of social reformers has the capacity to end poverty once and for all although they conveniently conflate absolute poverty with poverty in general and they are very quiet on rising world inequality

A United Nations report “*Inequality Matters*” (2013) showed that the top one per cent now hold 46% of the world’s wealth while a recent report by Oxfam (19 January 2015) stated that by 2016 the richest 1% is likely to own more wealth than the rest of the world put together. You would have to wait a very long time for either organisation to conclude that capitalism should be abolished.

Socialists do not dispute the figures from the United Nations which show that, in 1981, 52% of people in developing countries were earning \$1.25p a day and now that figure has fallen to 15%, although the statistics are artificially contrived by tame academics. Try to live on \$2 a day!

What we do dispute is the way in which definitions of poverty are plucked out of the air to produce economic policies that support and justify capitalism. When has the United Nations published any policy reports criticising either commodity production and exchange for profit or the private ownership of the means of production and distribution? Its policy pronouncements are not neutral but politically biased in favour of the rich.

After all, it is the rich through their governments who pick up the tab for the cost of the United Nations. The rich and powerful through their political representatives at the United Nations will always be shown in a good light. This fawning obsequiousness equally applies to organisations like the BBC who will not criticise the capitalist class, pretending instead it does not exist.

The fall in the number living in absolute poverty is largely due to the industrialisation which took place in India and China since 1981. However, statistics of the comparable level of earnings used by the United Nations today could equally be used for working-class living standards in Britain when capitalism was first established in the early 19th century

What is not generally recognised is that the higher level of wages, which increased in Britain during the 19th century, occurred largely because of the increasing effectiveness of trade union organisation. And it should not be

forgotten that improvements in the education and health of the working class had to be forced on the capitalist class even though they needed a fit and well-trained workforce to exploit.

Workers in China, despite the Chinese state and the competition for jobs, have also made headway through the formation of independent trade unions and the use of the strike. Free trade union organisation in the cities of India has also pushed up wages and salaries there, too.

And what of the working class in China living above £1.25 a day? Life in China is no bed of roses: millions of workers live unpredictable lives as cheap ‘hire and fire’ labour, forced to go back to the countryside when they cannot find work. Workers are regularly killed in construction, factory and mining accidents. The cities are smog-ridden. And like workers living elsewhere in the world Chinese workers are exploited in the production process, producing more than they receive in wages and salaries.

As for India, here is one recent report on the poverty endured by those now living above \$1.25 a day:

The Indian poverty line thus shows no consideration of the other aspects of poverty: homelessness or living in the slums, access to water, electricity, public transportation, job, etc... What's more, there is no standard definition of slums and the massive lack of research provides no account of the lives of the poor. This way no one knows the real extent of urban poverty in India.

[<http://www.poverties.org/urban-poverty-in-india.html>]

The definition of poverty used by the United Nations is also disingenuous. It focuses attention on extreme and absolute poverty, not on poverty *per se*. The fact that one billion people unnecessary live off \$1.25 or less a day soon takes the gloss off capitalism and allows us to question why poverty exists at all when sufficient food, medicine, shelter and other of life’s necessities could be produced if the right social conditions existed.

The author of the BBC news article, Linda Yuch, stated that only the United Nations had a working definition of poverty. This is not the case. First, just because the United Nations has a definition of poverty does not mean that this is the only one. Second, by conveniently excluding other definitions of poverty, social reformers can misleadingly show capitalism in a good light while the urgent need for a socialist alternative is dismissed as utopian and irrelevant.

In fact the definition of poverty used by the United Nations is a relative definition of poverty related only to an arbitrary monetary figure produced by its policy makers. This is not good enough.

For Socialists the definition of poverty is related to the ownership and non-ownership of the means of production and distribution. The definition of poverty used by socialists is objective and is not related to a monetary value but instead is related to lack of access to and ownership of the means of living, such as land, raw resources, factories, housing, education, food, transport and communication.

When someone is defined as poor in capitalism, it is because they do not have direct access to the means of production and distribution. In not having direct access to goods and services, men and women cannot flourish and lead worthwhile lives. Workers condemned to wage and salary employment cannot have much time to take part in the affairs of society. The wages system imprisons workers into a life of poverty.

The socialist definition of poverty is the only one worth considering and it finds capitalism wanting. What drives capitalism is not the need to abolish poverty but the need to make a profit. Capital accumulation and what Marx called the expansion of value is what drives capitalism, not meeting human needs. The consequence of this objective definition of poverty is that the majority of the world’s population live in need irrespective of what level of wages and salaries they receive..

So can we abolish poverty? Yes we can, but not the way BBC journalists, Bill Gates and Bono believe.

To abolish poverty you first have to abolish the cause. And the cause is the private ownership of the means of production and distribution. And that means getting rid of capitalism and the profit system.

To abolish capitalism does not mean leaving it to billionaire philanthropists and rock stars. Only the conscious and revolutionary political action of a world-wide socialist majority can abolish capitalism and replace the profit system with the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production by all of society.

As for those social reformers who believe poverty can be abolished by reforming capitalism, we can recall a remark made by William Morris in ART UNDER PLUTOCRACY over a century ago:

... they are about so much nearer to it as a man is nearer to the moon when he stands on a hayrack (quoted in SOCIALISM IN A CRIPPLED WORLD, C. Hampton, chap. 16 Socialism: The Struggle for the Future, p. 313).

OBITUARY: DOMINIC ZUCCONI

We have learnt of the death of Dom Zucconi. Comrade Zucconi was a member of the old Socialist Party of Great Britain from the early 1960s and joined the reconstituted Socialist Party of Great Britain in 2006 through his friendship with the late Comrade Baldwin. Due to illness he could not participate as much as he would have liked in Party activity but he supported us financially and attended lectures and debates.

Dom was a London taxi-driver but he also studied economics at the London School of Economics (LSE) and while studying there he was able to arrange for our late Comrade Hardy to give a lecture on socialism (a tape we possess). Dom was at the LSE at the time of the student protests and was highly critical of the way in which students prevented those they did not agree with from speaking or giving lectures.

Dom was well versed in Marxian economic theory and had a liking for history and economics. In later years Dom became a chess enthusiast and was planning to give a lecture on Chess and Socialism until his untimely death.

His funeral in Amersham was attended by comrades who met his family including his sister who had been a member of the old SPGB. We send condolences to his family including his brother.

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THE ERFURT PROGRAMME AND THE FAILURE OF REFORMISM

The 1891 SDP Conference in Erfurt, Germany

The German Social Democratic Party (SDP) had been founded in 1875 through the merger of two earlier parties. Despite repression under Bismarck's Anti-Socialist Laws between 1878 and 1890, the SDP enjoyed rapid growth and at the same time clarified its political program.

Despite illegality, SDP candidates increased their vote from 311,961 in 1881 to 1,427,298 in 1890. The 1883 SDP Congress, held in exile in Copenhagen, declared that the SDP was a revolutionary party with no illusions about reforming the capitalist system. At its first Congress after legalisation, held in Erfurt, the SDP adopted a new programme to replace the somewhat confused 1875 Gotha Programme which Marx and Engels had criticised at the time it was adopted. The SDP set out a programme of tactics, reforms and a vague theoretical goal. This was codified in the Erfurt Programme of the SDP in October 1891, and was adopted by other Social Democratic Parties.

The Erfurt Programme first appeared in English in 1896 in Bertrand Russell's book, GERMAN SOCIAL DEMOCRACY. He thought it "*perfectly orthodox Marxianism*" (p. 141), although, as a Liberal, he disliked the claim that "*the ignorant voter is as good a judge of current questions as the member who has especially studied them*".

YEARS (1948) also carried a translation of the text and accompanied it with a socialist criticism, highlighting the weaknesses and contradictions of the Erfurt Programme.

An examination of this programme will reveal the disappearance of all pretence to revolutionary action and an understanding of why the Social Democratic Party lost their way in a bog of reform... If the party had concentrated single mindedly upon the achievement of Socialism, with perhaps the demand for the suffrage, instead of wasting most of its energies upon the fight for reforms - which increased in number as time passed – how different might have been the shape of things in Germany to-day [1948], as well as in the rest of the world!

THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO AND THE LAST 100 YEARS, pp.26 - 27 THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO AND THE LAST HUNDRED YEARS The Erfurt Programme exists in two parts. The theoretical section was written by Karl Kautsky. The ‘practical’ section was, significantly, written by Eduard Bernstein, the pioneer of reformism (gradualism) within the SDP. The programme was a product of its times. Attention centred, particularly in Germany after the repeal of the Anti-Socialist Laws (1890), on winning democratic rights within a parliamentary framework.

The Erfurt Programme posed socialism only as a distant prospect and emphasised, as the SDP’s immediate tasks, the struggle for suffrage and other democratic ‘rights’ within capitalism. The programme was therefore ambiguous and in fact contradictory. It was the establishment of the SPGB in 1904, and the collapse of social democracy at the outbreak of war in 1914 that exposed these ambiguities and contradictions.

Frederick Engels and the Erfurt Programme

For Engels, the Erfurt Programme was a necessary concession to the period. But he warned vigorously against making the division between immediate demands and the socialist revolution a central feature of the programme. In his critique of the draft of the programme (a precursor of the final work drafted by Liebknecht), Engels urged that the minimum demands be linked to the socialist goal by a sentence to connect the two sections, reading: “*Social Democracy fights for all demands which help it approach this goal.*”[K Marx and F Engels, SELECTED WORKS, VOL 3, Moscow, 1970, p.433].

But, instead of this, the programme of Kautsky and Bernstein ‘linked’ the minimum and maximum sections by emphasising their *separateness*. Engels, who saw in the Liebknecht draft the danger that reformism would obliterate revolutionary socialism, wrote:

The political demands of the draft have one great fault. It lacks precisely what should have been said. If all the ten demands were granted we should indeed have more diverse means of achieving our main political aim, but the aim itself would in no wise have been achieved. [Marx and Engels, SW VOL 3, p. 433]

In the main, Engels, albeit with qualifications, was supportive of the draft of the programme and did not distance himself from it. (Note: His comments can be read in A CRITIQUE OF THE DRAFT SOCIAL-DEMOCRATIC PROGRAM OF 1891 [www.marxists.org].

Karl Kautsky and the Erfurt Programme

Significantly, Kautsky offered no analysis for achieving the demands of the minimum programme, beyond the ever-increasing numbers of, non-socialist, social democratic votes for the Reichstag from voters attracted by the reform measures.

Contrast this with the Socialist Party of Great Britain which appealed for Socialist votes only from Socialist voters, who understood and agreed with the Socialist case and its single Socialist object. The SPGB also stressed from the start the vital importance of building up a Socialist majority, capable of sending Socialist delegates to parliament with the express objective of controlling the machinery of government and to use that as the means of emancipation in order to establish Socialism.

The theoretical programme by Kautsky was turned first into a pamphlet and then into a book, DAS ERFURTER PROGRAM (1892), more popularly known as THE CLASS STRUGGLE. This was Kautsky's first book without the influence, advice and criticism of Engels. And it shows. The Socialist Party of Great Britain began translating the book into English but, on learning the contents of the fourth section, "*refused to have any more to do with it*" (Robert Barltrop, THE MONUMENT, 1975, p. 35). The fourth section explicitly argued that trade would exist between countries within "Socialism".

Contrast this nonsense with the Socialism advocated by the SPGB. Socialism would mean the abolition both of classes and of nation states, along with trade, buying and selling, and the wages system.

A year after Engels's death in 1895, one of the main SDP leaders, Eduard Bernstein, published a series of articles in the SDP's theoretical review, *Neue Zeit*, under the title *Problems of Socialism*, which challenged the whole basis of the SDP's program and perspectives. In 1899 Bernstein published *The Prerequisites of Socialism and the Tasks of Social Democracy*, which further developed his views.

Bernstein was influenced by the Fabians whom he met in England when in exile. He looked to the experience of French and British Parliamentarism, with their regular combinations of Liberal and Labour politicians, with their mounting tide of social reforms. He saw Parliament, not as a site for the enactment of revolutionary socialism but, instead, one for the pursuit of social reforms. Bernstein stated that the social movement was everything but the Socialist goal nothing.

As for Kautsky, he resolved the ambiguity within the Erfurt Programme by embracing reformism. Correctly he denounced the Bolshevik Revolution but he moved closely to Bernstein's reformism.

I then found myself closely linked to Bernstein. We came together again during the war. Each of us preserved his own political physiognomy, but in practical action we found ourselves almost always in agreement. So it has continued to the present day.

[Quoted in Salvadori, KAUTSKY AND THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTION: 1880-1938, New Left, 1996, p226]

A word on Kautsky and the First World War. In 1904 he accepted the cause of war as an aspect of capitalism. In 1905 he rejected the idea that war could be ended by a mass strike and that socialists should oppose war. In 1912 he urged political opposition to armaments. On the 3rd of August 1914, he attended a meeting of right wing reformists in the SDP, known as the SPD Fraktion, to discuss voting for war credits, a decision which had already been agreed by most of the group.

The Party then voted for war credits, by 78 to 14, while Kautsky tried to influence the various drafts but lost, and the SDP supported the war.

In November 1914, he was still voting against war credits - "*to salve my conscience*" as he wrote to Adler. But by 1915 he was arguing that socialists had to support the war to the extent that it was a war of national self-defense. [P. Steenson, KARL KLAUTSKY 1854-1938: MARXISM IN THE CLASSICAL YEARS, 1991, Chap. 6, pp 181-201]

In Steenson's book, there is a photograph of Kautsky's last public speaking appearance in Vienna in 1932. A year later, Hitler took power in Germany. If the SDP and other social democratic parties had argued for Socialism and only Socialism, how different 1914 and 1933 might have been.

Fundamental Political Errors of the Erfurt Programme

We can now consider what might be described as the four fundamental political errors in the Erfurt Programme:

First, the revolutionary Socialist objective was watered down to a level where it was no longer a concern or interest for the German SDP. The reformist wing of the SDP and the trade unions influenced their practical disdain for the socialist goal. Socialism was not seen as an urgent necessity but as a pure idealised future goal.

Kautsky held the view that the Socialist goal was embodied in theory, a theory which had to be protected from the day-to-day politics of the Party. For example, he wrote that the materialist conception of history was “*a scientific doctrine, in no way connected with the proletariat*” (F Jakubowski, IDEOLOGY AND SUPERSTRUCTURE IN HISTORICAL MATERIALISM, p. 64), as though the forces of production did not include the working class. He held that theory was injected into the working class from without by intellectuals. He wrote:

The bearer of science... is not the proletariat but the bourgeois intellectual; modern socialism therefore originates from individual members of this layer, and is communicated by them only to intellectually outstanding proletariats who then introduce it into the class struggle of the proletariat where conditions allow. [loc. cit , p. 118]

Socialist theory was pursued separately from the actions of the working class. So SDP politicians could indulge reformist demands made by workers; allow those with reformist views to join the Party, and encourage trade unionists to pursue whatever reform measures they and their membership desired. It also allowed Bebel in 1906 to congratulate the Liberal Party in Britain on their election success.

[Robert Barltrop, THE MONUMENT: THE STORY OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN., 1975, p. 35]

This political dualism in the SDP led not only to a split between the ‘ultimate’ Socialist goal and ‘immediate’ reform policies but the pursuit of reform policies at the expense of the objective.

The German SDP was not alone in making this error. The same problems emerged in the Social Democratic Federation, and led to the formation of The Socialist Party of Great Britain in 1904, by former SDF members who rejected leadership and reformism.

Second, the failure of the Erfurt Programme to pursue a solely Socialist objective led to the dominance, in the 20th century and since, of reformist politics. Reforms or palliatives, which at first were taken up as stepping stones towards Socialism, soon became just an end in themselves. The Social Democratic parties that took this line became parties which merely competed for votes against the openly capitalist parties, competing as to which party could offer the best set of reform policies. The Socialist goal, once removed from the political programme, leaves just reform politics, characteristic of social democracy the world over.

Third, there was the division of politics into ‘theory’ - which is something intellectuals do - and ‘practice’ - something which trade unionists *and* workers do. This led to a two-tiered party of the leaders and the led, -a politics explicit in Leninism and also characteristic of *all* major capitalist parties, including most of the Left.

Workers were expected to follow cheer leaders, not to think for themselves. As a result, the most important political proposition advocated by Marx was lost:-i.e. that the establishment of Socialism has to be the conscious and political work of the working class itself.

It is a mistake to see theory as separate from practice - in the real world, practical politics always enters into theory, and *vice versa*. When ‘practical’ politics entered Kautsky’s ‘theoretical’ world in the form of votes for war credits, he ended up siding with the practical side.

Not so the SPGB: unlike Kautsky and the leadership of Social Democracy, the SPGB opposed the 1914 war consistently and from the start, on the grounds that it was not in the interest of the working class to kill each other for the trade routes, spheres of influence and raw resources of the capitalist class. Instead of killing each, socialists called for class solidarity and an understanding of who their common class enemy was. For Socialists, the Principles of the Party were based on practical experience of the class struggle.

Though there was no explicit clause about war in the Party’s DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES, the Party opposed that war, and all subsequent capitalist wars, on grounds of class interest and internationalism, unlike the Social Democratic, reformist parties of the Second International.

Fourth, the SDP’s actions in the Reichstag led to parliament being replaced, as the focus for revolutionary socialism,

by direct action through mass strikes or councils of non-socialist workers (soviets); either spontaneously as urged by Rosa Luxemburg, or led by professional revolutionaries (e.g. Lenin and Trotsky). Parliament came to be seen only as a reformist institution, with no revolutionary socialist potential.

The SPGB has always insisted that parliament could be used for revolutionary ends and urged the necessity for workers to gain control of the machinery of government before establishing Socialism. When workers understand and desire Socialism, they have a practical route to end the class system and make it possible to establish one based on the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution by all of society.

There has not yet been any parliamentary test of the power of delegates acting on instructions given to them by a Socialist majority. Consequently, Socialism will not be possible until workers understand and vote for it.

When the majority of workers have become Socialists there will be no need for an armed uprising. Those who argue for forms of direct action – by way of armed uprisings, occupation strikes etc. for ‘workers’ control’ - are putting forward a suicidal strategy. As the SPGB has argued down the decades, so long as the capitalist class retain control of the machinery of government – including the police, jails, and the armed forces – these would be used ruthlessly to crush the Socialist movement, as happened with the Paris Commune, for instance.

The Futility of Reformism

The consequence for the working class of the SDP’s four political errors is that capitalism is still in place. As the SPGB argued, the Erfurt Programme was a: “*fatal flaw that was destroying the working class movement for Socialism*” [THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO AND THE LAST ONE HUNDRED YEARS, p. 27].

And what happened to Social Democracy? The German SDP and the British Labour Party became indistinguishable from other parties in capitalism. Other political parties like the SDF and the Independent Labour Party were absorbed into the Labour Party. For the SPGB, a programme of reforms is useless to a Socialist party.

The Socialist Party will not barter its independence for promises of reform. For no matter whether these promises are made sincerely or not, we know that the immediate need of our class is emancipation, which can only be achieved through the establishment of Socialism.

SPGB QUESTIONS OF THE DAY, p. 18 [1932 edition]

The SPGB... is the party with Socialism and nothing but Socialism, as its object... it cannot seek support for or advocate any policy of reform or anti-reform.

SPGB Socialist Standard, July 1911

The Socialist party must be an organisation standing for “*Socialism and nothing but Socialism*”. It must not be diverted into trying to tackle the individual problems of capitalism, no matter how pressing they may seem. It must not advocate capitalist reforms. It must not have leaders nor will it have, for its membership must be of men and women who know what socialism is and how it must be established.

The SPGB stands on its own OBJECT AND DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES. It is the Socialist object that is our ‘immediate demand’, not a shopping list of reforms. And what is the Socialist alternative? It is a social system in which the population of the world co-operates to supply the needs of all, by production solely for use; without no buying and selling, with no markets, no wages system and exploitation; no profits, no coercive state, no economic rivalries leading to armament and war.

The first ever editorial in the first issue of the SOCIALIST STANDARD (September 1904) set out what the Party stood for:

In dealing with all questions affecting the welfare of the working class our standpoint will be frankly revolutionary. We shall show that the misery, the poverty and the degradation caused by capitalism grows far more rapidly than does the enacting of palliative legislation for its removal. The adequate alleviation of these ills can be brought about

only by a political party having Socialism for its object. So long as the powers of administration are controlled by the capitalist class so long can that class render nullatory any legislation they consider to unduly favour the workers.

Only workers who accept the single Socialist objective can work effectively for Socialism: Socialism cannot be imposed on workers from above. Workers have to take conscious political action: workers cannot establish common ownership and democratic control of the means of production without being aware of what they are doing. And Socialism cannot be established except through political means, i.e. -the capture of the whole machinery of government, including the armed forces and the police “*in order that this machinery... may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic*”.

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WAR IN UKRAINE

As we argued in our pamphlet WAR AND CAPITALISM, there is a huge difference between the arguments and propaganda put out about war, compared with the real motives and the actual reasons behind governments’ decision to go to war.

{Those] politicians who claim that a war is a just one because it is about freedom and democracy are simply not to be believed. Democracy is not something they would go to war about. If that were the case, how come there are so many dictatorships in the world? Instead of going to war against a dictatorship, capitalist governments are much more likely to sell them weapons. A government’s real concern is the so-called ‘national interest’ - the interests of their capitalists. Only when these capitalist interests are involved do governments find it necessary to go to war.

For instance, look at the pretext given by Putin and his supporters. It is claimed that Putin is ‘defending the freedom and democracy’ of Russian-speaking people in East Ukraine. But in Russia itself, in the last few years, more than 300 journalists plus a number of human rights lawyers and various political activists have met their deaths.

Nemtsov, a former colleague of Putin who had become a political opponent, was killed within sight of the Kremlin, just before he was thought to be about to expose information about Putin’s role in stirring up the conflict in East Ukraine; Litvinenko was killed in London when about to publish a book exposing evidence of the Russian secret police (FSB) role in rousing Russian public opinion against ‘terrorist’ outrages – lethal bomb blasts allegedly done by Chechen terrorists but actually done by the FSB themselves.

As we all know, US presidents have for long operated at arms’ length from any dirty tricks done on their behalf or on their orders: ‘deniability’ is the key. ‘Democracy’ in the West supposedly relies on politicians being freely elected and answerable to the electorate. There is also the supposed independence of the courts and legal system, and the freedom of the media – press, TV, etc.

In Russia, some years back, under Stalin as under Lenin, those who were suspected of being in opposition to the regime – and many others – were liable to be ‘liquidated’, shot by the KGB or sent off to Siberian work camps where so many died, half-starved and overworked.

There are alive in Ukraine today many people whose relatives suffered when Stalin set targets for the elimination of the kulaks. Any peasant who had so much as a cow or a few chickens was liable to be picked up and sent off to the KGB’s forced labour camps, while their house and bit of land was handed to their neighbours as part of a vast collective or state farm, and their abandoned children were left starving in the famine, the neighbours being afraid to help them.

Stalin’s system lasted with some modifications beyond his death. The so-called Communist Party with its dictatorship of the apparatchiks remained, with its monopoly on political and economic power, through the

Khrushchev years, the increasingly corrupt Brezhnev period, through several elderly apparatchiks, until Gorbachev brought about some reforms including a measure of *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (reform).

His successor was Yeltsin, who took ‘reforms’ to indicate privatisation of the economy, with resulting ‘crony capitalism’, incredibly corrupt - effectively rule by gangster groups. Any businessman who refused to hand over a business to a competitor was liable to be eliminated or terminated by some Mafia-type hit-squad. Government was increasingly just a nasty protection racket, a kleptocracy.

It was in this system that Russia’s current President emerged from the obscurity of the KGB and its successors, climbing the greasy pole of local government in the notoriously corrupt, KGB-run city, St Petersburg. Picked as Yeltsin’s chosen successor, he had no qualms about the deal which gave Yeltsin, his family and close associates an amnesty, guaranteeing immunity regarding their corrupt business practices. That was Putin’s key to the door of the Kremlin..

Putin pledged that he would restore law and order. But his main achievement is to have conducted a series of wars, trying to re-establish the power that the Soviet Union used to have over its near neighbours. From Georgia, Chechnya and the Caucasus, through to Hungary, Ukraine, and the Baltic states, his policy is to restore the ‘Great Russia’ he supposes to be Russia’s birthright.

To get popular backing he relies on nationalistic rhetoric, appealing to the young, such as the notorious biker gangs. With total control over most of the mass media, including all the TV stations, he controls most of what Russian citizens are allowed to know of what is going on. If a few journalists try to report independently, as Anna Politkovskaya did about the casualties in the Chechen wars, they are systematically and ruthlessly eliminated. The mass media pound out nationalist propaganda and the reactionary Russian Orthodox Church, with government backing, seeks to impose its intolerance and superstition on all.

However it would be a mistake to assume that because Russia attacks the Ukraine, the Ukrainian government is some sort of angel of democracy. The Kiev politicians seem to be rather proud of the rightwing nationalist organisation which took sides with the Nazi SS in the 1940s: Bandera and his associates are now regarded officially in the western Ukraine as national ‘heroes’.

What wars are really about

East Ukraine is of some importance to Russia’s economy. While the Ukraine has traditionally been seen as Russia’s breadbasket, as an agricultural asset, Eastern Ukraine is of great importance for its industries and coal mines.

The Crimean peninsula is of huge strategic importance as a naval port, jutting out into the Black Sea, close to Turkey, the Mediterranean and the Middle East. At the time of the 1986 disaster at Chernobyl, Ukraine’s nuclear power plants provided enough energy to supply a small city.

In Europe, national borders have shifted hither and thither, so that parts of Poland and Ukraine have repeatedly moved from one nation-state to another. Yet from a jet plane, just as from satellites in space, there is little indication of these political borders. From space the whole earth is seen as one smallish, touchingly vulnerable and very beautiful planet.

Even the language test is rather fluid: how does one tell a Russian from a Ukrainian just by the way they speak? Similarly in the old Yugoslavia, Serbs and Croats spoke much the same language, even if it was written in Cyrillic if Serbian and in Western script if Croatian.

But these are not sufficient grounds for deciding to go and kill total strangers. Dogs do not fight about the different dialects they speak. They may fight about territory or over a bone or a bitch.

Similarly with humans: wars are usually fought, in a world of competitive capitalism, about oil and gas and other essential or valuable raw materials, or for control of markets and trade routes. In short, it is competing economic

interests that lie behind all modern wars and conflicts.

Putin's various wars have been over selective targets. In Chechnya, the key railway link to the oil-rich Caspian Sea runs through the capital city, Gorky, with its oil refineries. In Eastern Ukraine, he has targeted the major industrial and mining areas. The Crimean peninsula has strategic importance for the Russian navy as it is so close to Turkey, the Mediterranean, the Middle East and the oil-rich Gulf states.

Just as the US fights many wars and lets its foreign policy be largely dictated by the importance of Arab oil, likewise the policies of Britain, France, China and Russia are realistic in that there are real material, commercial, and geo-political strategic interests at stake whenever these states decide to get involved in wars.

Clearly wars are not fought in the interests of the working class. We may end up killed or wounded, or with our homes demolished, or running for our lives, or taking to risky boats as refugees. But even if we were lucky enough to end up on the 'winning side', we would not profit from wars. It is not the workers who end up owning those precious oil fields: it is our bosses. The working class can never win a war: the winners are always the capitalists and their parasitic cronies.

Put it another way, since as workers we do not own any country, to talk to us of defending 'our country' is meaningless. Hitler, and before him Kaiser Bill, did not decide to wage war at vast expense to get hold of our rented or mortgaged homes or our second-hand cars, and the like. They had rather bigger fish to fry.

So the Socialist message to all workers everywhere remains as we declared in THE SOCIALIST STANDARD in September 1914:

The Socialist Party of Great Britain pledges itself to keep the issue clear by expounding the CLASS STRUGGLE, and whilst placing on record its abhorrence of this latest manifestation of the callous, sordid, and mercenary nature of the international capitalist class, and declaring that no interests are at stake justifying the shedding of a single drop of working-class blood, enters its emphatic protest against the brutal and bloody butchery of our brothers of this and other lands who are being used as food for cannon abroad while suffering and starvation are the lot of their fellows at home.

Having no quarrel with the working class of any country, we extend to our fellow workers of all lands the expression of our goodwill and socialist fraternity, and pledge ourselves to work for the overthrow of capitalism and the triumph of Socialism.

This would mean an end, not only to poverty and all forms of exploitation, but to warfare in all its forms. When we see what mess capitalism is making of the world, we are amazed that workers cannot see how urgent is the need for Socialism – a society based on the *common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution, of all the world's resources, by and in the interest of the whole community*.

This is feasible and it could be do-able. But it can only be done with the active and class-conscious support of the majority, worldwide. It cannot be done while most of the world's workers remain blind to this as a realistic possibility, but continue to put their faith in capitalist policies forever promising yet more futile and ineffective reforms. Since capitalism is a system based on competition, war is one of those problems that capitalism simply cannot get rid of.

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SOCIAL REFORM OR SOCIAL REVOLUTION?

The journalist, Owen Jones, has followed up his book about CHAVS with a study of the ruling class in Britain. He has called his book THE ESTABLISHMENT: AND HOW THEY GET AWAY WITH IT (Penguin 2015).

Jones points out that the richest 1000 individuals are worth £520 billion while thousands of others have to queue at

food banks. Instead of being criticised for holding such wealth the “elite” and their political servants redirect people’s anger to the very bottom of society (p.29). He defines the establishment as a powerful interrelated political force that “represents an institutional and intellectual means by which a wealthy elite defends its interests in a democracy” (p.293).

He goes on to say that the current understanding of “democracy” is severely limited in scope and application and what is needed to address the gross inequality in society is a “democratic revolution” (p. 294). There needs, he believes, to be a sustained battle of ideas against the prevailing intellectual orthodoxy known as “economic liberalism”. These political ideas represent the ruling paradigm; a totalitarian market-informed hegemony that imposes, without question, the dogmatic doctrine of “there is no alternative” or TINA for short.

Jones argues that economic liberalism “...has proved a tremendous ideological victory, fostering widespread acceptance and resignation and sapping the will to resist” (p.294).

Jones explains the reason for the dominance of economic liberalism by reference to “the Overton window”; an opening through which people see the limits of what is politically possible. And what is seen today to be politically possible is the irresistible forward march of globalisation, free trade and free markets on and on into the future without any reasonable opposition or feasible alternative. Such a view of the world now constitutes a sensible, common sense and common ground to which all the main political parties subscribe.

As Jones remarks “... ideas that are outside the window are dismissed as extremist, dangerous, impossible” (p.294). The political group of fanatics who push the agenda of economic liberalism Owen calls the “outriders”, committed believers found in the dozens of free market think-tanks like the Centre for Policy Studies, the Institute for Economic Affairs and the mis-named Adam Smith Institute. These well-funded think-tanks formulate policy for governments and percolate their ideas through a tame and uncritical media to the general public.

However, as Jones points out, the Overton window is not static; the ideas that are now deemed to be common sense were once extreme themselves (p.295). And Jones recalls a point made by Marx in 1846 that: “*The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force*” (THE GERMAN IDEOLOGY, 1846, Collected Works, Marxist.org.com).

There are other competing ideas – socialist ideas - which are not the ideas of the ruling class, but they are currently ineffectual against the relentless and almost daily propaganda claiming capitalism to be natural and destined to last forever. This does not mean this will always be the case. Jones forgets that Marx also showed two years later, in 1848, that the capitalist class supplies the working class with: “*its own elements of political and general education*” (*The Communist Manifesto*) and the insights of Marx’s own scientific study of capitalism which allow socialists to comprehend theoretically: “*the historical movement as a whole*” (*The Communist Manifesto*).

However, what helped economic liberalism to become a dominant political force was the apparent end of the Cold War in 1989 and the utter defeat of the Soviet Union, its economic nationalisation programme and the political ideas associated with it. Politicians stated, over and over again, that there was no alternative to the capitalism found in the West, history had come to an end, and any opponents were ridiculed as deluded and dangerous extremists.

And it was important to split the working class to maintain the momentum of the new faith in capitalism without a practical alternative. A politically conscious and organised working class, acting in its own interest, is a threat to the New Order. So it has to be “divide and rule”: As Jones points it (p.296):

Low paid workers are encouraged by the media and politicians to envy the supposedly luxurious conditions of benefit-claiming unemployed people; rather than resent the employers for paying them insufficient wages. Private sector workers with no pensions are encouraged to envy public-sector workers whose pensions are still intact. Those who cannot get council housing...or...secure jobs are encouraged to envy migrants supposedly getting what is rightly theirs..

The disappointing albeit predictable part of the book is Jones’s prescription on what is to be done. He states that opponents of the establishment have no ready-made, coherent alternative to offer and the problem is further

compounded by increasing political apathy and disinterestedness by a sizable section of the electorate.

Jones believe that democracy should be extended to every sphere of life (p.302) coupled with a politics that needs “*to inspire the majority*” (p.312). He surveys the scattered political dissidents and remarks: “*If supporters of a democratic revolution are to succeed, it means bringing those fragments together, creating our own effective outriders*” (p.302)

Of course for an effective response to the dominant ruling class ideas of today we need to win, what Marx called; “*the battle for democracy*”. This requires socialist ideas to take hold and become the norm. Rather than a democratic revolution there is an urgent need for revolutionary socialism. And contrary to Owen Jones’s pessimistic view of the political landscape, a coherent political response to the ideas defending capitalism already exists, the ideas of Marx and the Socialist Party of Great Britain.

But socialism is not what Jones wants, although he continually describes himself as a socialist. His politics is the politics of the social reformer. Here is his list of social reforms which he believes are necessary to kick-start a radical and revolutionary politics:

- * A living wage
- * Elected representatives on boards of directors
- * Nationalisation of key industries
- * Taming financial institutions
- * Reform of the media

What have these social reforms to do with Socialism? Absolutely nothing. You cannot even call these reforms stepping stones to socialism for many have already been embraced by sections of the capitalist class and their political representatives.

There are capitalists and politicians like Boris Johnson who do want a living wage to be enshrined in law but for interests of their own against competitors getting cheap labour through tax credits and housing subsidies (BBC 5th November 2012). The INDEPENDENT and some of its journalists like Andreas Whittam Smith and Lee Williams, no supporters of socialism, have long argued for the nationalisation of the railways, utilities and the banks.

Capitalism in Germany already has trade unions on boards of directors which has the negative effect of undermining the clear and distinct interest of workers. And what reform of the media does Jones have in mind? Perhaps he has The Guardian as a role model for a new responsible media? Yet the newspaper’s owner, the Scott Trust, is made up of the great and the good from the very establishment that Jones criticises, and whose board includes people such as Will Hutton who despise socialism and believes the case of the SPGB is impractical and utopian. As a consequence, The GUARDIAN pushes an agenda of futile social reforms while acting as capitalism’s bleeding heart liberal conscience employing journalists like ... Owen Jones.

There are serious flaws in Jones’s argument. First, are the reform measures he puts forward really stepping stones to a radical alternative? Clearly not.

And second, who is going to initiate his reforms proposals – the Labour Party? There is more chance of the Pope abandoning Catholicism and embracing Marxism than of the Labour Party ever becoming socialist. The Labour Party has never been, is not and never will be a socialist party. It exists solely to administer capitalism on behalf of the capitalist class.

Jones appears to be unaware of the reason why the Labour Party exists and, like other deluded workers, still supports this disreputable political organisation, dripping in workers’ blood from either initiating or supporting wars from 1914 to the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. In spite of this bloody record, he tells voters to vote for a future Labour government at the General Election.

Jones could do no better than read the articles written by the Socialist Party of Great Britain. He would read a unique critique of capitalism and an argument for socialism deriving from a principled political programme which has shown, time and time again, the abject futility of reformism. Instead of reforms the SPGB has argued for socialism

Jones though does make one very good point. Economic liberalism, like protectionism, a regulated capitalism and large scale nationalisation, is not solid but friable and transient; just as Keynesianism was in its heyday. And its success has also become its failure. Capitalism, according to the "*outriders*" in the free market think-tanks was never meant to go into an economic crisis but it did.

Market anarchist "*outriders*" could no more stop the economic laws acting on capitalism than the Keynesian "*outriders*" before them. The promises of globalisation, free trade and free market have been buried under global wars. Markets have seen to fail, no more so than with the global damage to the environment. Free trade and free markets are now synonymous with an assault on trade unions, attacks on the level of pay and working conditions of workers as a whole through the "*liberalisation*" of the labour market and a future for the working class and our children looks bleak, ugly and unpredictable.

The consequence is a political and economic crisis of capitalism; an economics profession held in disrepute; politicians despised and perceived as cynical chancers with their snouts in the trough; and the contradictions of a world-wide capitalist system of class exploitation which is forcing the working class to see itself having a shared experience out of common material interests as wage and salary workers. That is, a global working class slowly seeing itself as having its own distinct economic and political interests. In this process of becoming "*a class for itself*" the political ideas of the Socialist Party Great Britain articulate a far greater coherence for winning the battle of democracy than anything dreamt of in Jones's reactionary philosophy

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THE DEVIL RIDES OUT

Socialists are often derided as starry-eyed idealists and utopians for suggesting that an alternative social system to capitalism is both possible and necessary. Given the pre-condition of a socialist majority acting consciously and politically the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution is both practical and feasible.

However, it has not escaped our attention that some, if not most, of our critics hold to some unquestioned religious conviction. Catholic opponents of the Socialist Party of Great Britain, for example, often ridicule the practical case for socialism but do so under the burden of theological doctrines and beliefs which border on insanity. No more so than the practice of Exorcism. Apparently the Vatican is training doctors; teachers and psychologists to cope with what it believes is an increase in demonic possessions. Exorcists are going to teach Catholics how to recognise such events – and what to do about it! (DAILY MAIL 16 April 2015). This is all very Hammer horror and Rosemary's Baby.

The Exorcism and Prayer of Liberation course began in April this year at Rome's Regina Apostolorum University with plenty of takers. We do not know if Dennis Wheatley's novel, THE DEVIL RIDES OUT is a set book; a fictional account of the Devil for those teaching a fictional account of the real world.

The course is sponsored by the Vatican Congregation for the Clergy which oversees matters regarding priests – which we suppose they have to these days giving the Church's track record on paedophilia. We don't recall the sexual abuse by priests against children excused by the Pope on the grounds of the Devil and all His works. As defrocked priests and cardinals pass through capitalism's criminal legal system, the council for the defence has never offered the Devil as an excuse for their client's actions.

Nevertheless, according to the Pope, the Devil exists and His activity is rising. The Pope and his advisers blame an increasingly secular society for the increase in demonic activity which, no doubt, includes the struggle by socialists against all forms of religious nonsense. This crass and anti-scientific theology is uncritically accepted by those Catholic economists, politicians and journalists who often deride the socialist case against capitalism as idealistic and

In a socialist society, doctors, teachers and psychologists would have better things to do than waste their time preventing a mythical Devil riding out of disturbed and fevered minds stuck in the feudal past. Against our critics we state that in socialism there would be free access and production just to meet human need. No doubt the Pope would like to turn the clock back to a time when those holding “secular beliefs” would be burnt at the stake and Papal absolutism would exercise the power of life and death over the faithful. Too late.

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THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN AND THE MINERS' STRIKE

NOTE:

The following is a statement published by our members at the time of the 1984 NUM strike. This was a controversial and highly emotive issue. The Tory government used the police and a lot of violence against the striking miners. The miners were facing large-scale job losses as the government wanted to close most coal fields, believing the future looked better with nuclear power and preferably without trade unions. By calling the NUM members out on strike without holding a ballot on the question, the NUM General Secretary Arthur Scargill went against the rules of the union. As a result, a breakaway union was formed and the miners were effectively split. The Communist Party and assorted Left groups such as the Trotskyist so-called Socialist Party were fully in support of Scargill. Within the SPGB there were some members who also got carried away. To re-assert the Party's consistent and clear message, we prepared the following statement which was circulated to all Branches of the Party.

At its formation the Party thrashed out a considered statement on the Trade Unions which was endorsed by Conference and Party Poll and was published in the 1905 Party MANIFESTO.

It stated that the basis of the trade unions must be a clear recognition of the position of the workers under capitalism and the class struggle necessarily arising there from, and that all actions by the Unions tending to side-track the workers from the only path that can lead to their emancipation, should be strongly opposed. Only action on sound lines should be supported.

In conformity with the party's opposition to leadership, workers in the unions were urged to keep control of union affairs in their own hands, including the need for a ballot to decide on strikes and a ballot to call strikes off. Apart from the democratic principle here involved, there is an elementary need for such ballots in order to ensure that the workers go out on strike together and go back together.

The holding of a pre-strike ballot deprives an anti-strike minority of the excuse to go on working. The holding of a ballot on ending the strike obviates the bitter internal dissension which accompanies a gradual, unorganized drift back to work and which in the miners' 6 months strike in 1926 crippled the Miners Federation for years through the formation of rival, breakaway, unions.

The Party has also consistently warned against the dangerous illusion that unions can defeat the state-power of those in effective control of the machinery of government, including the armed forces, when those in control decide that victory on a particular issue is vital to their class interests.

The major issue in the present miners' strike is the effort of the National Union of Mineworkers to prevent the closure of uneconomic pits and thus to maintain the number of men working in the mines.

Being organised, like other unions, on the basis of serving the interests of its members, this policy not only ignores the realities of capitalism, but takes no regard to the conflicting interest of other workers.

Directly, and through support of Labour Party policy, the N.U.M. has long been committed to stopping the import of coal. How does replacing foreign coal for coal produced by British miners preserve the jobs for miners? It simply means more jobs for British miners and fewer jobs for miners in other countries. Likewise the N.U.M.'s policy is to convert power stations from oil to coal and to expand the coal industry while cutting back on nuclear energy.

Other unions, on the same plea of saving the jobs of their members, have other claims. Unions in the electricity industry and the steel industry cross miners' picket lines on the excuse that they are saving the jobs of their members.

The N.U.M. claims that in fighting to preserve jobs for British miners it is serving the interest of the working class in respect of creating or preserving jobs for all workers. This means supporting the policy of the Labour Party. Mr. Scargill has gone on record with the claim that the return of a Labour government would "*get rid of unemployment and create meaningful jobs*".

This betrays a total ignorance of the workings of capitalism. The varying number of jobs available to the working class here and in the rest of the world, depends on variations from time to time in the market demand for commodities at profitable prices.

There is nothing such strikes can do to increase the number of jobs or rid capitalism of unemployment.

In accordance with the Party's commitment to bring the unions to a clear recognition of the position of the workers under capitalism, the Party has a continuous obligation to explain the facts of capitalism and the need for Socialism to miners and all other workers.

CAMDEN BRANCH
28 AUGUST 1984

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Statements on Democracy 1, 2 and 3

CAMDEN BRANCH STATEMENT ON DEMOCRACY - 1

There has always been discussion about the usefulness to a socialist party of the kind of parliamentary system that exists in this and many other countries: the limitations of the system; and the conditions governing its creation and continuance.

It is accepted that in Britain that the parliamentary system was set up by the capitalist class in their own interest; including their need to "*drag*" the working class "*into the political arena*" (COMMUNIST MANIFESTO).

The chief initiative came from the capitalist class. Already in the 1780s the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition were both preparing bills for the introduction of universal adult male suffrage. It was the French Revolution in 1789 and consequent widespread fear among the capitalists of similar revolutionary movements in this country that postponed electoral reform for decades.

Experience in several countries has shown that the "*parliamentary system*" is liable to be curtailed or even withdrawn when there is extensive disorder, including that created by minority attempts at armed revolt.

While the majority of workers are not socialist there is no way in which we can prevent them from supporting anti-democratic parties as happened in the nineteen-thirties.

There ought to be no doubt about the usefulness of these opportunities, as can be seen by comparing them with the situation that exists when they are severely curtailed, as happened in war time.

In war-time publications of the SOCIALIST STANDARD became subject to censorship, its despatch overseas was prohibited and it could not be sold to soldiers or to military areas. During World War One, this was held to apply to Conscientious Objector Labour Camps and the Executive Committee instructed members to observe this restriction. In World War One the Party had to suspend all outdoor meetings.

These and other restrictions made it much more difficult to carry on propaganda and the Party suffered accordingly.

These war-time restrictions were of course in addition to the limitations that always exist, i.e. financial, the libel laws and the Official Secret Acts, and the general refusal of the Press, Radio and Television to give publicity to the Party case.

The Party has always recognised that while capitalists and their agents control the machinery of government including the armed forces they were able within very wide limits to impose their will on society and apply whatever restrictions they wish to apply.

It is sometimes argued that the authorities are themselves restricted in their freedom of action by the existence of laws passed by Parliament.

There is little in this because, whenever they so desire, the authorities, with the consent of Parliament, can easily amend or suspend Acts of Parliament and in certain circumstances the Courts can and do ignore them.

Under Defence of the Realm Acts in World War One (and similar legislation in World War Two) the following drastic curtailments were made, quite legally:

- (a) General Elections were suspended and none took place between 1910 and 1918 and between 1935 and 1945.
- (b) All the restrictions referred to in paragraph 3 were applied legally.
- (c) All or most strikes were liable to prosecution.
- (d) Numerous new offences were created, including such vague offences as "*spreading alarm and despondency*".
- (e) Particular examples of actions by various organisations held to be offences were: circulating the Sermon on the Mount as a leaflet, and urging workers to engage in strikes.

Under the 1918 Representation of the People Act thousands of conscientious objectors, including Party members, were disenfranchised for five years.

It is just as easy for the authorities to declare a state of emergency in peace-time as in war-time, with power to impose similar restrictions, as during the General Strike.

The reason the Party suspended all outdoor meetings in World War One was not only the near impossibility of escaping prosecution under the legal offence of "*spreading alarm and despondency*" but also the action of the Courts in backing up illegal prosecutions. When mobs broke up legal meetings (often incited by newspapers) the police would ignore the action of the mobs and charge the speakers with "*breach of the peace*" and the Courts upheld the police.

It should be noted that the trade unions, because of their backing, were in a somewhat different position.

Hundreds of strikes in two world wars and in the years 1945 to 1951 were in fact illegal, though the authorities in most cases chose to turn a blind eye on it.

While the socialist movement has little backing among the workers there is little we can do but accept or seek to evade restrictions imposed by the authorities. As the numbers increase the situation will be correspondingly altered, either because the authorities will proceed with more caution or because (like the trade unions) we shall be better able to resist and at some stage socialists will be elected to Parliament.

Our propaganda should always stress that socialism and democracy are inseparable; that there is no way to socialism except through the democratic action of a socialist majority; and that it must proceed through democratically gaining

control of the machinery of government, including the armed forces.

In countries where the “parliamentary system” does not yet exist, or where it is curtailed or suspended, socialists can only use whatever restricted opportunities there are to propagate socialism and its inseparable link with democratic methods. They should do this independently and in no circumstances confuse the issue by associating with non-socialists.

CAMDEN BRANCH, September, 1977

SUPPLEMENTARY STATEMENT ON DEMOCRACY - 2

Reasons for supplementing the original Statement

Camden Branch circulated the “Statement on Democracy” at 1978 Annual Conference.

The discussion at Conference showed that some very brief references to the views of Marx and Engels in the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO had been misrepresented. Some delegates wrongly interpreted those references as meaning that in the opinion of Marx and Engels the workers had no need to conduct their own struggle but could leave the parliamentary system and democracy to the capitalists.

The misunderstood passage in the Camden Statement was:-

It is accepted that in Britain that system (the parliamentary system) was set up by the capitalist class in their own interest; including their need to “drag” the working class into the political arena (Communist Manifesto). The chief initiative came from the capitalist class.

This related to the view of Marx and Engels that, because the capitalist class had to get the help of workers in order to win power for themselves against the landed aristocracy, the capitalists were compelled to drag workers into the political arena. “*Initiative*” was used in its ordinary meaning of “*first step; act of setting a process in motion*”

Statements in the Communist Manifesto

After explaining why the capitalists need a new “*social and political constitution*”, Marx and Engels showed that the capitalists could not hope to win unless they got the help of the working class.

The bourgeoisie finds itself involved in a constant battle. At first with the aristocracy; later on, with those portions of the bourgeoisie itself whose interests have become antagonistic to the progress of industry; at all times with the bourgeoisie of foreign countries. In all these battles it set itself compelled to appeal to the proletariat, to ask for its help and thus to drag it into the political arena. The bourgeoisie itself, therefore, supplies the proletariat with its own elements of political and general education; in other words, it furnishes the proletariat with weapons for fighting the bourgeoisie.

In saying that the capitalists had to drag the working class into the political arena Marx and Engels were not saying that this was the end of the process, but only the beginning as far as the workers were concerned.

We have seen above, that the first step in the revolution by the working class, is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy.

As Engels wrote in 1895 (INTRODUCTION TO THE CLASS STRUGGLE IN FRANCE):

The Communist Manifesto had already proclaimed the struggle for the general franchise, for democracy, as one of the first and foremost tasks of the militant proletariat....

How the capitalists initiated the process

In France the workers were bought into the political arena in the revolution of 1789.

In the U.K. the process had been set in motion before 1789. It was the regular practice of Whigs and Tories to stir up demonstrations and riots to obstruct government policies or to unseat a government.

One of the new monied men of capitalism who did this was John Wilkes, in his campaign to decrease the control of George III over Parliament. J.H. Plumb (ENGLAND IN THE 18TH CENTURY) gives two examples:-

At the time of Walpole, the Corporation of the City of London had purposefully and deliberately, inflamed the lower classes against the authority of the government; at the time of Wilkes there had been no hesitation in using the economic grievances of the journeymen for political ends.

This process of dragging the workers into the political arena was not just popularising the idea of votes for workers, though Fox, Wilkes and “the radicals” all did this in the 18th century.

The initiative had come from the capitalists and it was only later that workers began to take up the struggle themselves.

Plumb shows how this latter development began when the French Revolution scared off many of the capitalist politicians:

From 1789 there is a deepening division in the ranks of English radicalism, a left-wing composed largely of working men with middle-class leaders; a right-wing of young Whigs devoted to the cause of Parliamentary Reform and the person of Fox.

Also, under the influence of the writings of Thomas Paine;

Popular societies of which the most famous was the London Corresponding Society were founded to propagate this policy and served as a school in which a rapidly-awakening working class was educated in their revolutionary views. Raymond Postage, POCKET HISTORY OF THE WORKING CLASS

All these societies demanded universal male suffrage.

When Marx and Engels wrote the Communist Manifesto they had already seen how the capitalists had to rely very heavily on working class support to secure the Reform Act 1832 which gave the capitalists a dominating position in Parliament: and, though less heavily, in the campaign, by the Liberals Cobden and Bright, to secure the abolition of the Poor Laws in 1846.

They had also seen the unsuccessful struggle of the Chartists to obtain the franchise, a predominantly working class movement though it included among its prominent leaders Thomas Attwood, the banker whose interest was to get working class support for the abolition or reform of the gold standard.

The earliest success of the workers was on the industrial field. In spite of savage repression they had formed illegal unions to such effect that in 1824 the government had no choice but to give them legal recognition.

Later on, as trade unions established themselves more widely and gave the workers experience and self-confidence, the unions formed their own associations campaigning for the vote. In the campaign leading up to the enfranchisement of town workers in 1867 the Trade Union franchise associations were in competition with the National Reform Union, set up by Liberal capitalists and led by Bright with the object of winning over the workers to support the Liberal Party and Gladstone by promising them the vote. The result was an overwhelming Liberal victory at the 1868 general election. CAMDEN BRANCH, JULY 1978

STATEMENT ON DEMOCRACY - 3

Contribution to a Seminar held at Head Office 16th/17th September 1978

The question which socialists should be concerned about is not whether capitalism democratically administered is preferable to capitalism under a dictatorship: but what is the most practical way to propagate the socialist case under both conditions. Should our case be adapted or amended to suit either form of administration? Further, can the socialist associate with non-socialists for the limited objective of seeking to establish democratic rights where these do not exist on the ground that political democracy is an essential prerequisite for the establishment of socialism? The short answer is that he cannot without compromising his position.

In the case of a dictatorship regime as in Russia, political parties are prohibited; there is severe censorship of the press, and the so-called Trade Unions are under the control of the government. An openly organised socialist party would not be permitted, but neither would any non-socialist party, institution or publication which was critical of official policy. The Russian dissident movements with which we are familiar are reformist in character, and cover a wide field. These comprise movements for human rights, art, culture and literature (artistic freedom), religion, Jewish emigration, ethnic minority movements, nationalist movements. These groups are not united, and have no common aim. There are no dissident socialist movements, nor any movement for the introduction of democratic government and the formation of new political parties of which we are aware. With the pressures of the growing and conflicting property interests within Russia, the agitation to form capitalist political parties will intensify, and they will eventually be formed. The same process will also take place in the present State controlled trade unions, and independent unions will emerge.

The Communist Party in power will try and prevent any challenge to its monopoly, but will have to give way or be overwhelmed by economic events – for example – strikes, industrial crises, falling productivity and increasing government expenditure.

The advantages of the parliamentary form of government have been demonstrated to the capitalists time and time again and as a long term measure is the most efficacious way of administrating the system. The development of the parliamentary system allows private property interests to establish their claims on the social capital; freedom of trade and freedom to exploit workers. In addition, it assures all sections of the capitalist class of the broad support of the non-socialist working class without the social upheaval and uncertainty which usually accompanies the demise or downfall of a dictator.

The long term view is not always accepted and some capitalist regimes become blinded to their own interests and seek short term solutions to their immediate problems. Russia is the classic example. However the manner in which political power is administered, the point remains that it is firmly in the hands of those who wield it. In theory the capitalist class can literally do anything from suspending law enforcement, creating new laws, to making trade unions and political parties illegal. In practice, their success in this respect depends entirely on the amount of resistance against them, which in essence are the forces of the class struggle, which they cannot control. Political idealism must give way to the production of surplus value.

A socialist party obviously would be at a disadvantage were it not allowed to operate openly, as in a dictatorship. However, the main difficulty confronting the socialist is not due to the conditions under which he operates but getting across socialist ideas to a non-receptive working class. In democratic Britain and America where there are little restrictions on socialist meetings and the publication of literature, and where conditions are relatively favourable, we face an enormous task. The additional burden of operating under-cover would be one to which socialists would simply have to adapt themselves, and this fact must be faced. The alternative is to abandon the struggle.

We cannot support non-socialist left wing or liberal democrats in any attempt at constitutional reform aiming for democratic government or other political rights. This is a reformist position. Apart from the practical difficulty of breaking off support when the objective had been achieved, we would have taken on a commitment to oppose any

moves by the reigning government to take away or restrict any of the rights previously gained.

The first thing a socialist should recognise is that demands for democracy and other political rights are always coupled with the objective of a particular movement, irrespective of whether these take the form of nationalist or ethnic movements, as in South Africa, or in the case of backward countries, developing capitalist movements aiming for political power. There has never been in modern times a pure movement for democratic rights in themselves, or in isolation from the aims of the organization seeking the change. In this respect the socialist organisation must follow the same line, i.e. that the struggle for elementary political rights must be joined to the reason why we seek such rights. We want socialism, so our position is that we struggle for both rights and socialism as an inseparable whole.

Where there is no franchise, as in backward countries, we struggle for the franchise because without it, no matter how large we may become, we would be impotent because we could never gain control of the political machinery for the establishment of socialism.

Within a dictatorship where the franchise exists but where there is a one-party system we must struggle for the right to organise a socialist party. Following on from this, we must demand to hold socialist meetings and publish socialist literature. This is what is meant by struggling for elementary political rights, but it must be stressed over and over again that the struggle for these rights is an inseparable part of the struggle for socialism, and as such forms an integral part of the socialist case. In addition to this, we should advise workers to form Independent trade unions and fight for better conditions.

As long as we combine political rights and our socialist objective we shall be able to keep the socialist case clear, and not become involved with non-socialist organisations, which we must continue to oppose and who may appear to share some of our aims some of the time. Our opposition to them must be based on their whole case, and we should never adopt the "*curate's egg*" approach; viz. that some parts of a bad case are better than others. The forms of government are of minor concern to the socialist as indeed they are to the vast bulk of the working class who are more interested in jobs, wages and prices, than politics.

The prerequisite for socialism is the struggle to create working class understanding; that and that alone is the only political manifestation of the class struggle. The struggle to establish democratic capitalism is non socialist and reformist and cannot be supported by socialists because of the capitalist objectives of the participants.

J. D'Arcy, Camden Branch September 1978

Jobs For All: The Record of the Labour Party

In 81 years there were five periods of Labour Government. In all five periods, unemployment was higher when they went out of office than when they went in.

1929 – 1931: Up from 1,164,000 to 2,806,000
1945 – 1951: Up from 104,000 to 281,000
1964 – 1970: Up from 347,000 to 546,000
1974 – 1979: Up from 628,000 to 1,299,300
1997 – 2010: Up from 2,200,000 to 2,500,000

Of course similar trends can equally apply to Tory governments including the Thatcher/Major government from 1979 (1,400,000) to 1997 (over 2,000,000). Socialists draw the Marxian conclusion that politicians can do nothing about economic crises and trade depressions.

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CLASS, CLASS INTEREST AND CLASS

STRUGGLE

The capitalist class came into existence through class struggle and social revolution thereby establishing what Marx and Engels referred to as “*new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of old ones*” (THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO). The establishment of capitalism also gave birth to the working-class, free in two senses of the word: free from direct access to the means of production and distribution, and free to sell their ability to work to an employer for a wage or salary. From the perspective of history the working class movement towards socialism is relatively young; its movement is not smooth and linear. Mistakes have been made and there are periods when this movement is stronger than in others.

Marx and Engels said that the working class movement passed through four principal political stages in its development: an incoherent stage with the actions of groups like the Luddites, then the establishment of trade unions in the face of state coercion, then a more coherent phase which saw workers identifying themselves as a class with their own distinct political interests such as the Chartist movement, and then another phase which saw the establishment of a socialist party necessary to establish socialism.

This phase was reached at the start of the last century with the establishment in 1904 of the Socialist Party of Great Britain. The Party’s OBJECT and DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES, which was drawn up by working class men and women, presented both a sound and valid Marxian critique of capitalism, and a practical political programme as to how to achieve socialism. A socialist majority, through the revolutionary use of the vote and the capture of the machinery of government, could establish the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution by all of society.

As the Socialist Party of Great Britain wrote in a 1948 pamphlet, THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO AND THE LAST 100 YEARS:

In 1904 a new era in working class politics commenced with the formation of the Socialist Party of Great Britain. The Object and Declaration of Principles that were laid down by the founders of this party...have remained to this day a clear and concise statement of the basis of the organisation, admitting of neither equivocation nor political compromise with the enemy for any purpose however alluring. Here is no flirting with reforms nor false and soothing catchwords to enlist the sympathies and support of those who lack political knowledge but, instead, a straightforward statement of the essentials of the working-class position under Capitalism and the only road to its solution – the capture of political power by a working-class the majority whose members understand what Socialism means and want it (pp 28-29).

And for this the capitalist left; from the now defunct Independent Labour Party through to the Soviet Union supporting Communist Party of Great Britain and on to the decomposing Trotskyist political parties of the early 21st century, there is nothing but political hostility towards the Socialist Party of Great Britain. And for a very good reason.

Since our opponents are incapable of offering a coherent political debate, the SPGB is written off by them as a “*sect*”; of little or no political importance; “*the small party of good boys*”. Their historians write us of out of history, and their leaders pretend we do not exist and try to deny us political space. to expose their. The problem for our political opponents, though, is that we have a future and they with their anti-working class politics don’t.

From 1904 the socialist movement and the formation of a socialist majority necessary to establish socialism has been painfully slow. Not without reason. Being small in number, socialists find it hard to disseminate socialist ideas. There is the problem of socialist identity when so many other political parties misleadingly describe themselves as ‘socialist’ or ‘communist’. And there is the problem of persuasion; of persuading workers - in the face of intense propaganda from the media and elsewhere - to become aware of their class position, to understand that capitalism can never be made to work in their interest and that the only way to solve the many social problems that reformers have plainly failed to resolve is through conscious political action as socialists.

Our position has been made all the more difficult by the conservatism of the decomposing capitalist Left. For instance, the so-called Revolutionary Communist Party which in 1990 stated that: “*for the time being at least, the working class has no political existence*” (LIVING MARXISM December 1990). Seven years later Frank Furedi wrote: “*In today’s circumstances class politics cannot be reinvented, rebuilt, reinvigorated or rescued*” (*Class Politics cannot be rebuilt or regenerated today*, LIVING MARXISM May 1997).

The conservatism of LIVING MARXISM set out above was only mirrored by the conservatism of MARXISM TODAY, the theoretical journal of the Communist Party of Great Britain. This best forgotten journal was packed with the writings of the future intellectual cheerleaders of Tony Blair and New Labour.

These people also argued that the working class was finished as a political force, and went on to invent the empty and opportunistic doctrine of New Labour to hide their own bankrupt politics. Meanwhile the capitalist Left’s pursuit of a “*broad democratic alliance*” of everyone and everything was well and truly torpedoed with the demise of the Soviet Union

For the capitalist left, 1989 was a year in which to embrace Free Market institutes, to establish pompous sounding think-tanks like Demos and the Institute of Ideas, to produce pamphlets for the Centre for Policy Studies (founded by Margaret Thatcher and Keith Joseph), and to join the brave new world of Tony Blair’s New Labour project. Formerly would-be student revolutionaries, these people now declare there is only capitalism and all else is utopianism.

And from The Socialist Party (ex Militant Tendency). (*The Case for Socialism*), Socialist Workers Party (*The Future Socialist Society* by John Molyneux) and Counterfire (*The ABC of Socialism* by John Rees) we do not find any understanding of socialism. Instead, these opportunistic organisations propose not only the disastrous strategy of direct action but when workers read their pamphlets the “*socialism*” they advocate is nothing more than State Capitalism.

These self-appointed leaders believe they have been anointed to tell workers what to do and how to think; from “*democratic centralism*” to a dictatorship over the proletariat. They are not interested in making socialists or organizing for socialism. They pretend the SPGB does not exist. However their continued decomposition gives us more political space to argue for a genuine socialism to be put to the working class.

Socialists never lost our nerve. We stand as ever on the solid ground of principle, not opportunism. The working class does not need leaders to lead them anywhere particularly by the likes of Professor Furudi, Martin Jacques et al. The working class does have a political existence in the activity of Socialist Party of Great Britain. Working class politics does not have to be “*reinvented*” or “*rebuilt*”.

The working class still has the capacity to think and act for itself and to establish socialism. After all, the working class currently runs capitalism from top to bottom, albeit not in their class interest. As Marx recognized:

This organization of the proletarians into a class, and consequently into a political party, is continually being upset again by the competition between the workers themselves. But it ever rises up again, stronger, firmer, mightier.
THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO

At the moment the capitalist class has a vast pool of disorganized labour across the world to tap into: many workers have difficulty even organizing into free trade unions. They are misleadingly told that there is no alternative to global capitalism but this will not always be the case.

The labour market is a global labour-market with a world working class having the same class interest and the same need to organize - economically into trade unions and politically as socialists. Workers wherever they live experience the same problems and take part in the same struggle. A world working class really does confront a world capitalist class.

Socialists have one major factor in our favour: capitalism itself. It is the failure of capitalism to meet the needs of all of society and its relentless class exploitation that generates socialist consciousness, socialists and the political class

struggle. This was the conclusion of Marx and Engels when they wrote the Communist Manifesto in 1848 and is a view subscribed to by socialists today.

CLASS TRAITORS

Unfortunately for the SUNDAY TIMES, the recent re-publication of the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO by Marx and Engels has made its way up to no.9 in the Sunday Times Paperback bestseller list (28 March 2015).

Instead of praising the reading public on its good political sense in buying the book, the SUNDAY TIMES writes off the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO as mere “*political ideology*”. To be accused and vilified as “*ideology*” in the eyes of the tired old reactionaries at the SUNDAY TIMES is to accuse the authors of having written a withering critique of capitalism that is false and is not rooted in reality; something alien and false imposed on society.

Why is the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO so widely read if it bears no resemblance to reality? Is not the reason precisely because it contains ideas which are rooted in the actual experience of the working class, it does reflect the society in which we live, and it does point the way to replacing capitalism with socialism? Is that what the SUNDAY TIMES fears when it notices the rise of the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO in its paperback top ten?

To dismiss the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO as mere ideology is just childish political abuse. This knee-jerk demonization of the pamphlet's revolutionary ideas derives from fear. The COMMUNIST MANIFESTO is considered by the ruling class and its political servants to be far too dangerous to be read by men and women capable of thinking for themselves without first being written off and belittled by professional political hacks.

And for those who are “*ideological*” in the correct Marxian use of the word, that is, producing ruling class ideas in the News International stables, we only have to look at those who have taken Murdoch's shilling. These political streetwalkers are to be found plying their trade in and around 1 London Bridge Street with no sense of shame or humility. Class traitors, one and all.

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PICKING THROUGH THE BONES OF THOMAS PIKETTY

How many people managed to finish reading Thomas Piketty's CAPITAL IN THE 21ST CENTURY, all 665 pages? Assuming a chapter a day it will take someone 17 days to complete reading the book and then add-in one final day for the notes, contents in detail and tables and illustrations.

Those who did finish the book will not be doing so again in a hurry! This book vies with Stephen Hawking's A BRIEF HISTORY OF TIME as something most people start but never finish. Some readers, in desperation, are playing a game *100 uses for Capital in the 21st Century* while one web site boasts “*How to write a Marxist Critique of Piketty without even reading the Book*

Do you really need to publish such a weighty tome to conclude that for the past 200 years world social wealth inequality has increased and is going up? Who is supposed to be the audience? What is Piketty's political agenda? And why choose this particular title clearly a reference to Marx's CAPITAL?

Does Piketty arrogantly claim to be the new Marx for the new century? Crikey; he does! Move over Marx, here comes Professor Piketty. A “*reformist*” pretender to Marx writing an economics text-book for enlightened politicians and policy makers. Do they exist? Piketty never tells us.

The book was published in 2013 although Piketty states that he started research some 15 years before. How many researchers and academic assistants he had to help him we are not told. Clearly these are the unnamed “*doctoral*

students and young scholars" (p. vii) cited at the beginning of the book. Perhaps it was one of these students who read up on Marx, who cut out the quotations from Capital and woven in the footnotes of the text.

Although Piketty denies reading Marx, except, perhaps, the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO when an undergraduate, someone clearly has read Marx because there are detailed references to tax data used by Marx in appendix 10 of book 1 of CAPITAL, and reference is also made to comments made by Marx about factory accounting and productivity in *Wages Price and Profit*.

And there is also faint praise by Piketty for Marx in a section running some 5 pages under the heading Marx: *The principle of infinite accumulation (pp 7-11), despite Marx devoting "little thought to the question of how society in which private capital had been totally abolished would be organised... (p. 10).*

But how could Marx describe a socialist society in detail? The level of development in the forces of production and the situation at the time of socialist revolution would be completely unknown to him. The establishment of Socialism and freedom from capital is dependent on the working class, not Marx. It will be for future socialists democratically to determine socialist institutions, socialist affairs, and how and what to produce and for whom. Marx rightly avoided utopian speculation. The best Marx could do was to give generalisations: "*from each according to ability, to each according to need*" was one of the more useful generalisations he gave of a socialist society. "*The abolition of the wages system*" is another.

Piketty's Marx is of course a straw Marx; easy to construct and easy to knock down. Piketty claims, for example, that Marx held a "*collapse theory of capitalism*" (p. 1):

Marx thought that capitalism would have an "apocalyptic" end but thanks to "modern economic growth and the diffusion of knowledge" that has been avoided. But there is still the problem of the "deep structure of capital inequality

Marx never held such a theory and said so in THEORIES OF SURPLUS VALUE. He wrote: "*there are no permanent crises*" (VOLUME III, Part II, p. 269). Then there is Piketty's petty put-down stating that Marx "... decided on his conclusions in 1848, before embarking on the research to justify them" (p.10). In short, Piketty believes Marx forced his theory to support a pre-formulated conclusion. Marx was no scientist, then, unlike the great professor Piketty. But Marx began CAPITAL by investigating the commodity and his scientific research developed from there through the application of a scientifically grounded method of abstraction. Not content with creating a straw Marx, Piketty does a vindictive

Reviewers sympathetic to Marx have already torn to shreds Piketty's negative comments regarding Marx's critique of political economy. The question is why Piketty bothers to take Marx on?

Piketty's claims that Marx said there was a tendency for the rate of profit to fall to zero and that Marx failed to take into account innovation and the efficiency of new machinery when discussing the centralisation and concentration of capital: these were without foundation. Like Keynes before him, Piketty wants to clear Marx out of the way and he does not care how he does it . As Engels remarked at his graveside, Marx was "*the best hated and most calumniated man of his time*". He still is.

In any case, Piketty shows his own economic ignorance when he discusses capital. He treats capital as a thing not as a social relationship between people. He ignores capital as a social power and he does not treat the capitalist as "*personified capital*" as Marx does in CAPITAL.

This was Marx's comment on the social power of the capitalist through the process of capital accumulation:

Capital comes more and more to the fore as a social power, whose agent is the capitalist. This social power no longer stands in any possible relation to that which the labour of a single individual can create. It becomes an alienated, independent social power, which stands opposed to society as an object that is the capitalist's source of power.

Piketty has got no further in studying capital than those people in the 19th century that Marx described as “*vulgar economists*” and who after his death morphed into “*neoclassical economists*” with their supply and demand curves. Whoever it was who read Marx’s CAPITAL for Piketty’s book did not understand either Marx’s method or what he was saying. It really does seem that a naïve research assistant has prepared the notes on Marx for Piketty to use uncritically in the book. That is, if we are to believe Piketty’s claim that he did not read Marx in the first place.

The fundamental political difference between Marx and Piketty is the question of focus. Marx’s focus is on the ownership of the means of production and distribution and the freedom of labour from the tyranny of capital. Piketty is a social democrat distributionist. He wants to retain capitalism but to abolish its inequalities and even this, he believes, is a largely a utopian exercise (chapter 15 *A Global Tax on Capital*, p. 515).

Here are some of Piketty’s offerings from his reformist menu to be found in part 4 of the book; a global tax on capital, 80% tax on high incomes, financial transparency and the use of inflation to redistribute wealth downwards. These reforms are hardly original and hardly successful; just an example of the monotonous futility of reformism from one generation of social reformers to the next. When will the reformists admit that they have nothing else to offer?

Whereas Marx addressed the working class as the political agency of revolutionary change, Piketty addresses whom? There is just an empty chair facing him. And that is both the question and answer to Piketty’s menu of social reforms. There is no one to progress these reforms; there is no enlightened politician to be found. Capitalist politicians do not exist to serve the interest of all society - just the minority; the so-called one per cent.

Rather than enduring the social power of capital in the 21st century, the way forward for the working class should be the abolition of capital altogether; social revolution not social reform. We need a world-wide socialist revolution rather than just another failed redistributive panacea for the effects of capitalism. We do not need Piketty but rather the formation of a socialist majority to consciously and politically deal with the capitalist cause of the problems facing our class.

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CORRESPONDENCE

Hello

I wonder if you could answer a question. Most listed companies on the stock exchange are made up of small and large shareholders. Many of the small shareholders are in the working class. Also some of the large shareholders like pension funds represent millions of workers who pay into the funds. In what sense can these companies be considered capitalist in the way Marx understood them? Are they really owned by a capitalist class to the exclusion of the working class? One influential writer, Peter Drucker, wrote somewhere that socialism already existed but socialists just have not recognised this fact. I would be interested in your reply. Andrew Pearson, via email

Our Reply

Regarding Peter Drucker’s absurd claim that Socialism already exists but we are not aware of it, then workers should just try producing directly to meet human need and try to exercise direct access to what they and their families need to live on and see what happens: arrest, trial and imprisonment for the ‘crime’ of violating private property ownership.

Our answer to the first question is that Marx and Engels understood how, as capitalism developed, different forms of ownership came into being, including *collective* capital ownership. Capitalism developed various forms of ownership - from the individual owner, to a partnership, to family firms, to the joint stock company, to listing on stock exchanges, and other forms of capital ownership like nationalisation or state capitalism.

In pension companies and investment trusts, unit trusts and building societies, it is possible for large sums of capital to be invested, including pooling relatively tiny amounts of investments and savings from the ‘widows and orphans’ sector. In gambling on the horses, the old Tote used to perform a similar function, pooling a number of very small bets into a very large ‘*totalisator*’. The exploitation of the working class remains a constant – just it’s very hard indeed to find out just who is the beneficiary of our unpaid labour. Not like the ‘*good ol’ days*’ when the capitalist or boss actually owned the business, lock stock and barrel.

Capital is now anonymous and international – and it is a collective, a sort of ‘*Grand Union of Capital*’, the “*collective capitalist*”.

There is also the same situation of anonymous, pooled, capital ownership when the state owns a business or an industry. Consider the National Health Service and other state-owned or part-owned industries and services. Again, this is a form of ‘*collective*’ ownership of capital – which is why the Labour Party’s claims about ‘*public ownership*’ were such a fraud.

Whether in individual ownership or any form of collective ownership, the profits come from the surplus derived from the unpaid labour of the working class.

This fact – the fact of working class exploitation via the wages system – the fact that our **labour power** is a **commodity**, sold as such to employers at its value which is less than the value of our collective output: this can be seen in the books of any business or state enterprise. The difference between **A** what a company pays its workforce and pays for its raw materials and other overheads and costs, and **B** what it earns from the sale of its goods and services: that difference is a surplus from which it can pay off any loans from banks, pay taxes, and put something aside for growth or research and development, i.e. capital investment ploughed back for the future of the business.

And also, importantly, the enterprise must be able to pay nice big dividends to its shareholders and allow for generous-to-the-fault deals for Chief Executive Officers to enable them to receive their ‘compensation’ in bonuses and stock. For example, “*in 2012 the 500 highest-paid executives of U.S. companies received 83% of their compensation in stock*” (TIME, 6 April 2015).

Competition means that companies are anxious to maximise their dividend payments to ensure that pension funds and other investors continue to see them as useful sources of income, that is, from the companies’ perspective continue to supply them with capital funds. Also to keep their top executives especially those star turns the CEOs, happy and well-motivated, and less willing to move on to some other company with even deeper pockets.

From our point of view, workers have to carry on their backs the costs of maintaining the greedy fat cats and CEOs, the dividend-eating class, and a vast horde of investment bankers, consultants, accountants, think tank ‘experts’, politicians, economists, Royalty, and other more or less useless types of parasite..

And then we are told the poor ol’ taxpayers simply *cannot afford* the cost of old age pensions or other state ‘benefits’ for the disabled or unemployed, let alone allowing, out of all that surplus, for an increase in our wages.

Collectively we are exploited as a class by the capitalist class as a whole – a system which is simply not in our interests.

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Object and Declaration of Principles

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN HOLDS:

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (ie land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.
2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle, between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.
3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind without distinction of race or sex.
5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.
6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organise consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.
7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.
8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

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